



How to Make Family Meal Times Enjoyable



Are meal times enjoyable for your family? Do you beg your kids to eat? Is there a battle every day trying to get them to eat...something...anything? Here are a few ideas to try:

Eat meals together. Have you ever chased a little one around the house offering him/her small bites of chicken? Mealtime is a great time to train our children to eat properly, to use good manners, and interact well with others when we all eat at the same time. Make meal time a special event with good food, pretty plates, candles, and certain rituals. And serve the kids what the adults eat—home is not a restaurant where everyone picks what they eat from a menu.

Don't use food as a reward or punishment. “Just eat three more bites and you can have dessert.” We've all said it, but things get really stressed when eating is all about coaxing and punishment. (Not healthy habits!) I've had picky eaters who only wanted French fries and ketchup, but we must train them. One thing I always did was give them vegetables first—usually raw, as that is how they best liked them. If the child refuses to eat it, simply take the food away. One pediatrician recommends to refrain from begging or even asking them to eat, and *do not praise them for eating*. Keep the conversation positive and not focused on the food, so that the kids will want to be at the table.

Encourage everyone to have a small helping. Some nutritionists say that kids need to taste new foods many times before they willingly eat them. How many of you wouldn't touch tomatoes as a kid but love them now? Also involve your children in the preparation and they may be more willing to try foods they have made.

Curb snacking! It's okay to feel hungry between meals. Grazing is a term that describes what many children do—they walk around the house with food or drink throughout the day. My mother has a saying, “Hunger is the best spice.” Children who arrive at the table genuinely hungry are more likely to eat what is offered.

Reconnect and enjoy one another. Share a joke or story. Ask: *What's the best thing that happened to you today?* Genuinely listen to one another. Laugh. Sing. Pray, not just before meals—although that is important—but also when someone has a prayer concern.

